

PRESENTING THE LOWELL 100

In celebration of our centennial year, the International Institute of New England is honoring 100 remarkable individuals, but it is the sum of their collective impact and their undeniable diversity that inspires us most.

The creation of the “Lowell 100” was a labor of love: we sought nominations from all corners of the community, consulted our Advisory Committee and other trusted leaders, poured over our historical archives, and drew from our contemporary community and allies.

Once we had our list, we faced the nearly impossible task of capturing 100 incredible lives in very short paragraphs. We excerpted from their nominations, quoted their family and friends and, at times, drew from the obituaries of those we have lost.

We also spoke with the honorees directly, encouraging them to define themselves, and to choose their own words to describe immigration, war, culture, heritage, and success.

We are humbled by all they have been willing to share, everything they have accomplished, and their tireless commitment to the City of Lowell.

Please allow us to present the Lowell 100...



International
Institute of
New England

LOWELL100

CIVIC LEADERS

Michael Ben Ho is a Cambodian genocide survivor who helped 26 of his family members escape to Thailand in the 1970s. After resettling in Lowell in 1983, he co-founded the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, which is still thriving today, Trairatanaram Temple in North Chelmsford, one of the first Buddhist temples in the region, and the Cambodian American Voter League. Mr. Ho worked as a social worker for the State's Department of Human Services, where he educated his colleagues and the Department about Cambodian culture.

Tem Chea is a Cambodian genocide survivor who arrived in Portland, Oregon with his family in 1981. When he and his family moved to Lowell in 1987, Mr. Chea worked as a Parent Liaison Coordinator at the Parent Information Center for the Lowell Public Schools. He later worked as a teacher and then a School Social Worker within the Lowell School District. In the 1990s, Mr. Chea served as the Vice Chair on the Board of the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association and co-founded the Cambodian American Voter League. In 2008, he was honored by the University of Massachusetts - Lowell in celebration of 30 years of Lowell's Southeast Asian community. His daughters both work in the Lowell Public Schools, Dr. Phala Chea as the Coordinator of the English Language Education Program and Phakdey Yous as a School Psychologist; his son, Sowadi Chea, is a business owner in Durham, North Carolina.

Vanna Khim Sok Howard, Vanna Khim Sok Howard, a Cambodian genocide survivor, is the Communications Director for Lowell Community Health Center. Previously, Ms. Howard served as Greater Lowell Regional Director for U.S. Representative Niki Tsongas for more than 10 years, where she was a strong voice and advocate for Lowell's Asian and African communities. Ms. Howard started her career volunteering at the former St. Julie Asian Center in the mid-1990s. Today, she serves on multiple non-profit Boards of Directors and is Chairwoman of the Lowell Housing Authority Board and a Commissioner for the Asian American Commission. She is proud and honored to have been part of making Lowell's Khmer Refugee Monument a reality.

The Howe Family has contributed to the vibrancy of Lowell for multiple generations. Richard Howe Sr. served on the Lowell City Council for 40 years, including four terms as Mayor, and helped to lead the development of Tsongas Arena and LeLacheur Park. Today, Dick Howe is the author of a celebrated blog, "Lowell Politics & History," that tracks the latest political and historical happenings in Lowell.

Joe Hungler is Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lowell. Throughout his career, Mr. Hungler has been an advocate for youth from all walks of life and has created a climate of welcoming and inclusion within the Club. Mr. Hungler has shared his expertise in youth outreach and mentoring through his role as a national training associate since 2001, and was inducted into the Boys and Girls Club of Nashua Hall of Fame in 2019.

John J. Janas, the son of Polish immigrants, served with distinction as the first Polish-American Mayor of the City of Lowell from 1954 - 1955. In 1962, Mr. Janas was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. He served both the Polish community and the community at large and was, by many accounts, a popular and effective Mayor and legislator. The John J. Janas Memorial Rink of Lowell is named in his honor.

The Jeknavorian Family is actively involved in the Lowell Armenian Revolutionary Federation which recognized its 124th anniversary this year. Mr. Armen Jeknavorian also serves as Chairman of the Merrimack Valley Armenian Genocide Monument Committee. The family is deeply committed to raising awareness of Armenian history and the genocide.

Dr. Bowa George Tucker, born in Sierra Leone, has many years of experience working with refugees and other vulnerable populations. From 2000 - 2012, he served as Project Director of GEAR-UP at the University of Massachusetts - Lowell, creating college access for low-income and first generation students. Today, Dr. Tucker is a Regional Consultant for the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement where he helps to ensure the best outcomes for refugees and other newcomers in California, Nevada, Arizona, and Hawaii.

Tooch Van arrived in the U.S. as an international student in 1996 and went on to earn B.A. in International Studies at Trinity College, an Advanced Certificate in Public Policy and International Affairs at Princeton University, and a Master's of Law and Diplomacy (MALD) from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Tooch has held positions at Middlesex Community College (MCC), the University of Massachusetts - Lowell, the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, and MHA/Vinfen, where he has advanced education, health, civic engagement programs. Having lost his entire family in the Cambodian genocide, Tooch remains committed to honoring them through his commitments to the Cambodian diaspora community, and by introducing his children and other children to Khmer language and culture.



FAITH LEADERS

Hugh Cummiskey, an immigrant from Ireland, was instrumental in establishing the Irish community in Lowell in the 1830s. Serving as a de facto spokesperson and advocate, he was a respected leader of the first Irish immigrants to Lowell. Alongside other Irish Lowellians, he helped found Lowell's first Catholic Church, St. Patrick's Parish. Mr. Cummiskey served the wider Catholic Church by acting as the Lowell agent for Boston's Catholic newspaper, The Pilot. Upon his death in 1871, he was lauded with tributes and hailed as a builder of bridges between communities.

Venerable Sao Khon Dhammathero was born in 1934 in Siemreap Province, Cambodia, and was ordained as a novice monk in 1948. Upon coming to the U.S., he founded Trairatanaram Buddhist Temple, the first in Greater Lowell, and served as head monk. He was also President of the Community of Khmer Buddhist Assistance Association. Venerable Sao Khon Dhammathero was a vital influence in shaping the Greater Lowell Cambodian community by serving as a board member, counselor, and adviser, and by assisting youth in gang and violence prevention. He was working towards building a Buddhist Temple in Lowell by 2020, with a connected cultural center and senior center, with the aim to support those among Lowell's Khmer population who still suffer from the traumas of war.

Father Leonard Faris of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church has worked with his community to welcome refugees to Lowell and to create an inclusive environment for all immigrants. Because of his leadership and the church's history, services are offered in Arabic, as well as English. Father Faris' church, which celebrated its centennial in 2017, has historic ties to immigrants having been founded by Lowell's first Syrian community in 1917.

Nellie Husson Skaff was a lifelong communicant and devoted member of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church. She was the first woman to serve as the Church's President. Mrs. Skaff was also a member of the choir and President of the Ladies Society. She was a two-term president of the New England Region of Antiochian Orthodox Women of North America and, in 2001, was presented with the Certificate of Meritorious Award for her many years of dedicated service to St. George Parish. She was instrumental in founding the Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations of the Antiochian Archdiocese over 60 years ago. In addition to her active involvement with the Church, Mrs. Skaff was an Arabic tutor at the Edith Nourse Rogers School.

Pastor David Malone was installed as the Pastor of Eliot Presbyterian Church in 1990. Pastor Malone led his congregation in conducting outreach to the West African, Kenyan, Cambodian, and Brazilian communities in Lowell, building invaluable bridges between the church and newly arrived immigrants. As a result of active and forward-thinking efforts in community engagement, he was the recipient of a Local Hero award from Community Teamwork, Inc. in 2002.

Pastor Jeremiah B. Menyongai, Jr. is the Senior Pastor and General Overseer of Christ Jubilee International Ministries in Lowell, of which many African immigrants are congregants. Prior to immigrating to the U.S. from Liberia, he taught at various institutions of higher learning and was also a radio and television personality, delivering faith-based media programming. He is the author of numerous books and articles and serves as the Treasurer of Lowell's African Cultural Association.

Father Stanislaus Alexander Ogonowski, a Polish priest, was assigned by Archbishop Williams in 1904 to establish a Polish Roman Catholic parish for the growing Polish immigrant community in Lowell. By September of 1904, under Father Ogonowski's leadership and with some of his own physical labor, Holy Trinity Church was completed. For the next 50 years, he shepherded the parishioners of Holy Trinity Parish as their pastor and was honored with the title of Monsignor. Among Monsignor Ogonowski's accomplishments are the founding of St. Stanislaus School, the first Polish parochial school in the Boston Archdiocese, and the establishment of Holy Trinity Cemetery in 1924 and a youth center in 1954.

Khamsone "Ken" Silavong, a Lowellian born in Laos, served as a Clerk for the Laotian Buddhist Association of Greater Lowell, founded in 1985. Mr. Silavong was also a traditional musician, and was interviewed for the Laos Collection housed within the Library of Congress' Archive of Folk Culture, which consists of documentation of traditional culture from around the world. His interview focuses on his exposure to music, and the importance of music to older generations.

EDUCATION LEADERS

Fred Abisi is a life-long Lowellian, and the grandchild of Lebanese immigrants. He was the first full-time Director of the Lowell Adult Education Center, where tens of thousands of students have accessed English language and Adult Basic Education. The Abisi Center, named in Fred's honor after his retirement, partners with 40 agencies throughout Lowell and is the top-funded Adult Education center in Massachusetts. Mr. Abisi was named Director/Administrator of the Year by the Massachusetts Association of Adult & Continuing Education and received the Marjorie McDermott Award from Community Teamwork, Inc. He formerly served on the International Institute's Board of Directors.

Dr. Mario Aste was born in Sardinia, Italy and immigrated to the U.S. in 1967. He was a Humanities Professor at Lowell State College (now University of Massachusetts - Lowell) for 38 years, where he served as Chair of the Cultural Studies/Language Department. Dr. Aste inspired countless students and colleagues, and published widely on Italian folklore, cinema, and immigrants. During the 1980s-1990s, he sat on the Board of Directors of the International Institute, including a term as President, for nearly two decades. Dr. Aste was devoted to his family and community. He volunteered in many civic and cultural organizations, including food demonstrations at the Lowell Folk Festival, St. Vincent De Paul Society, St. Michael's Parish/School activities and Lowell Youth Soccer. In the words of his beloved family: whether near or far, Mario's love transcended zip codes and borders

Dalia Calvo served as the Executive Director of the Lowell-based private non-profit, Unitas, Inc. The organization supported the interests and the social and economic potential of not only Hispanics in Lowell, but the entire community. Unitas' services included support with housing and employment, connections to healthcare and education, and beyond.

Elise Cox Martin served as Instructional Leader and then Assistant Dean at Middlesex Community College from 1996 to 2018. In the 1980s, Ms. Martin was a beloved ESOL instructor for refugees from Cambodia and Vietnam, and left lasting impacts on her students.

Dr. Maria Cuesta arrived in Lowell from Cuba in 1962 just before the Cuban Missile Crisis. She earned her Doctorate in Education from the University of Massachusetts - Lowell, and served on the Board of Directors for Lowell Catholic High School, as well as reviewing education grants for the Department of Education at the federal level. Dr. Cuesta worked in the Lowell Public Schools for 35 years, including as a Curriculum Facilitator for the school system. She retired as Vice Principal of the Bailey School, which housed a Bilingual Program, in 2007.

Maria D. Cunha immigrated to Lowell from the Azores with her family in 1967, and settled in the Portuguese enclave known as "Back Central." Ms. Cunha entered Lowell public schools with no English proficiency and, with encouragement from her teachers, went on to graduate from Regis College in 1978 - the first member of her family to do so. For over 30 years, Ms. Cunha has been a key supporter of immigrants and refugees in Lowell, both through the International Institute, Congressman Marty Meehan's district office, and in her role at Middlesex Community College today.

Victoria Estfan was born and educated in Syria. She later immigrated to the U.S., had three children, and was the director of all Syrian and Arabic language activities at the International Institute during the 1930s and 1940s. A profile on Mrs. Estfan at the time noted: "She is recognized as one of the most capable and efficient Arabic instructors in the entire country." She was also ahead of her time by promoting education through social activities and dramatics.

Dr. Robert Forrant, Distinguished Professor of History in the College of Fine Arts, Humanities, and Social Science at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, is the grandchild of Italian and French Canadian immigrants. He has been largely responsible for documenting and bringing to life Lowell's immigrant history and has taught and published widely on the topic. Remarkably active in the community, he frequently gives talks and leads walking tours to contextualize Lowell's past and connect it with the present. With the support of Mass Humanities and in partnership with Professor Ingrid Hess, Forrant is currently building an interactive online learning tool, the Library of New England Immigration. He has been instrumental in guiding the International Institute to understand its own story as an organization.

Adriana Giraldo, a Colombian immigrant, has served as Student Services Coordinator at Abisi Adult Education for 14 years. Adriana left a corporate career in order to support newcomers in Lowell. Her passion is to connect students and community members with local services. She is always looking for ways to provide civics and citizenship education to those who need them. And, as a volunteer, Adriana has been a board member of the Friends of the Pollard Memorial Library for 10 years.

Dr. Sue J. Kim is the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies for the College of Fine Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and Co-Director of the Center for Asian American Studies. She is project director of the Southeast Asian Digital Archive (www.uml.edu/seada), a user-friendly repository of cultural heritage materials from the Greater Lowell region.



EDUCATION LEADERS

Jacqueline Moloney, Chancellor of University of Massachusetts - Lowell, is the first woman to lead the University since its founding in 1894. As chief administrator, she manages a \$500 million annual budget and oversees the activities of 2,000 employees and more than 18,000 students, hailing from more than 60 nations. Chancellor Moloney has led the university's internationalization efforts and has played a key role in modernizing and expanding the university's urban campus. Chancellor Maloney is also the Former Director of Indochinese Refugee organization.

Fannie Moore taught at Lowell High School in the 1960s and 1970s. She was involved with the Lowell Model Cities Program, the Lowell Art Association, the Lowell Museum, the Lowell College Club, and the Lowell Girls Club. A Scholarship administered by Girls, Inc. has been established in her name.

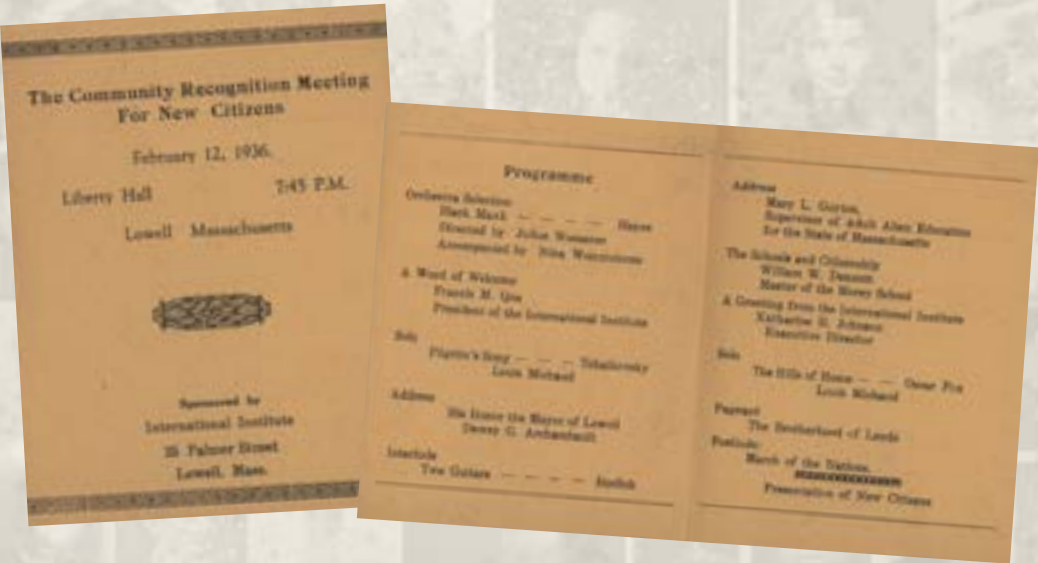
Molly Sheehy and the late Paul Sheehy have been life-long educators and advocates for public education. In addition to their personal support for countless young people, they dedicated their entire professional lives to expanding and promoting educational opportunities for all, particularly in Greater Lowell. These two individuals launched a number of programs benefiting immigrants, low income and other marginalized students. In 2010, Molly, a first-generation American, received the Unsung Heroine Award from the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women.

Lura Smith founded the Lura Smith Fund in Lowell in 1999 with a mission is to embrace the unity reflective of the life and legacy of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The fund achieves this by offering programs, events, and educational scholarship opportunities within the culturally diverse community of Greater Lowell. Over the years, immigrant students have benefited significantly from this support. Ms. Smith is a longtime resident of Lowell and is actively engaged with the community through her involvement on numerous non-profit Boards of Directors.

Dr. Ardeth Thawngmung immigrated to the U.S. from Myanmar, and is Chair and Professor of the Political Science Department at the University of Massachusetts - Lowell. Dr. Thawngmung is a co-founder and President of Saydanar, a Burmese community self-help organization operated by Burmese refugees and immigrants in Lowell. She regularly returns to Myanmar to conduct research and has published widely on the politics of the conflict and economy.

George Tsapatsaris, the son of Greek immigrants, was an educator for 40 years and was appointed Superintendent of Lowell Public Schools in 1990. During this time, he raised money to build and renovate schools throughout the City. Recognized as an outstanding educator throughout Massachusetts, Mr. Tsapatsaris worked tirelessly to ensure that all of Lowell's children had access to a quality education.

Dr. Maria Vejar-Mason emigrated from Ecuador to the U.S. where she became an educator and administrator at Lowell High School. She was the first Latino woman to hold the position of House Dean. She is very involved in the community and has created several programs to benefit the students of Lowell. Dr. Vejar sits on the Associate Board of Project LEARN and organizes the annual Ecuadorian flag-raising at City Hall. She has helped to organize La Chic Boutique and Tux, a program that has provided 600 students with the opportunity to obtain formal attire for the prom. She is also an entrepreneur and owner of the Galeria De Los Andes, which is located in downtown Lowell.



HEALTH & WELLNESS LEADERS

Mercy Anampiu is the Director of Health Promotion and Education at Lowell Community Health Center. She promotes a variety of health services for patients and the public and facilitates professional development for staff and the community at large. A Kenyan immigrant herself, Ms. Anampiu has been a strong advocate for the African community for many years and serves on multiple volunteer boards.

Ms. Dorcas Grigg-Saito served as CEO of Lowell Community Health Center from 1997 to 2016 and established its Metta Health Center to merge western medicine with traditional eastern medicine. Today, Metta Health Center plays a vital role in providing healthcare and community health programs to Lowell's Southeast Asian communities as well as newly arrived refugees, and Lowell Community Health Center touches the lives of almost half of Lowell's diverse population. Ms. Grigg-Saito's southern family was deeply committed to civil rights, which influenced her own convictions and career.

Kowith Kret & Niem Naykret arrived in Massachusetts in 1980 and in the 1990s, respectively. Kowith began teaching English to refugee and immigrant high school students the day after he arrived. In 1987, he was hired by the department of Mental Health and later transferred to the Department of Developmental Services. After almost 40 years, he retired from his DDS Services Coordinator position. Today, Mr. Kret provides Khmer interpretation and supports families who have lost a loved one with funeral arrangements through the temple. He has also volunteered and raised funds to support those living with HIV/AIDS in rural Cambodia. Niem Naykret is a Bilingual-Bi-cultural Care Coordinator and Community Health Worker at Lowell Community Health Center, working in pediatric behavioral health integration. During her eleven years with the Health Center, she has supported programs for teens, refugees, and survivors of torture. Niem is an active volunteer. Together, the couple have worked to improve the lives and health of their community.

Sheila Och, born in Puerto Rico, serves as Chief of Community Health and Policy at Lowell Community Health Center. Ms. Och has worked in the field of public health for 20 years and has served on the Boards of Directors of many area non-profits. In 2018, Ms. Och was the recipient of the Kathy Reticker Executive Leadership Award and was selected for the Community Health Center Advocacy Award and as one of "50 Faces of the Future" by the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers.

Toy Vongpheth immigrated to the United States from Laos on July 13, 1987. Today, she serves as the Refugee Health Program Coordinator at the Metta Clinic at Lowell Community Health Center, and plays a key role in ensuring that newly arrived refugees have access to healthcare. Toy is a strong advocate for these families and individuals, and regularly goes above and beyond her job description in order to support them.

ARTS & CULTURE LEADERS

Sara Bogosian, President and Executive Director of the Whistler House Museum of Art, emigrated to the U.S. from Buenos Aires, Argentina. Under Sara's leadership, the museum has gained global recognition, promoting the birthplace of James McNeill Whistler, his works, the City of Lowell, and regional artists. Sara has not only grown the museum into a profitable organization, the quality of exhibitions has reached new levels, the network of artists has expanded throughout New England, and the museum now offers programs for youth and artists-in-residence. Sara is highly active in the community, having served on over 20 boards and organizations. She connects with her Armenian heritage through her board work at the National Association for Armenian Studies and Research, the church, and the Armenian community in New England.

Tim Chan Thou learned Cambodian folk dance as a twenty-one year old in a Thai refugee camp, having fled his homeland during the Cambodian genocide. After immigrating to the U.S., Mr. Thou founded the now nationally recognized Angkor Dance Troupe in 1986, which supports the preservation and innovation of Cambodian artistic arts. He received the Community Teamwork Inc. Local Hero Award in 1997.

Mico Kaufman was a Romanian Jewish Holocaust survivor who spent two years in Italy before becoming a proud American immigrant. A renowned artist, and a Fellow of the National Sculpture Society, Mr. Kaufman's work can be seen in Lowell, throughout the U.S., and in collections around the world, including at the Smithsonian. He is the only artist to have received commissions to design and sculpt four official inaugural presidential medals, an example of his remarkable contributions to the United States. Mr. Kaufman is survived by his life companion and business partner, Ms. Elsie Howell, who contributed one of his sculptures to tonight's event.



Yary Livan, resident of Lowell, is a Master Artisan of Cambodian Ceramics, estimated to be one of only three master ceramicists to survive the Cambodian genocide and the only one known to be living in the United States. In 2002, Mr. Livan began a three-year residency at Harvard and, in 2003, began teaching art to urban youth through the Museum of Fine Arts. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) National Heritage Fellowship in 2015. He has shared his art with the Lowell community through Middlesex Community College and the Lowell National Historical Park.

Mary Sampas began her career in journalism while still in high school, and wrote for both the Lowell Sun and Evening Leader; her column ran for 75 consecutive years. She had an intense and abiding interest in Lowell's cultural activities and served on the Boards of Directors of many organizations including the Lowell Art Association, the Community Concerts Association, and the Hellenic Culture Society of which she was a founding member.

Dahvy Tran Pech, the daughter of Cambodian refugees, is the Executive Director of nationally-recognized Angkhor Dance Troupe. She is also a beloved former member of the International Institute team, having served as Youth Program Manager. Dahvy is passionate about elevating Cambodian community issues and sits on several Boards of Directors.

Ms. Eleni Zohdi emigrated from Greece to the U.S. and is the owner of Eleni's Fashion and Tailoring in Lowell. Eleni has shared her skills with countless students, including refugee clients of the International Institute, and has represented Greek cuisine at the Lowell Folk Festival for over 30 years. Upon retirement, she seeks to transfer her business to a refugee tailor.

WELCOMING & INCLUSION LEADERS

Farouq Ali and Nawal Thyab arrived in Lowell as refugees from Iraq in 2006. Mr. Ali is a long-time interpreter for the International Institute and a leader in the local Iraqi community. Mrs. Thyab is the "unofficial spokeswoman" for Lowell's Iraqi women's group. Together, Farouq and Nawal have played a critical role in welcoming and supporting Lowell's Arabic-speaking refugees for over a decade. In the words of Farouq, "We will continue helping our community as long as we breathe Lowell air."

Andrew Ansara was born in 1921 to a Lebanese-American family. He was the first male employee of the International Institute of Lowell in the 1950s and later served on the Board of Directors, taking responsibility for documenting the organization's history. As District Immigration agent for the state and federal government, Ansara helped thousands of immigrants make their way to the U.S. The Ansara Memorial Scholarship has been established to assist the youth of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church pursue higher education.

Gordon Halm emigrated from Ghana to the U.S. where he founded the African Community Center of Lowell, which recently celebrated its 2nd anniversary. In 2000, he founded the Lowell African Cultural Festival, which is still thriving today. Mr. Halm is a former Youth Specialist at the International Institute and the recipient of a Local Heroes Award from Community Teamwork, Inc. and the Cultural Heritage Excellence Award from the Lowell National Historic Park. He is currently writing a children's book, the story of Parsley, the chicken.

Katharine H. Johnson was the Executive Director of the International Institute of Lowell during World War II and oversaw the reorganization of the International Institute of Lowell from an arm of the YWCA to an independent organization. Under her leadership, IIL offered family reunification support, Red Cross nursing classes, citizenship, and legal aid services.

Biar Kon is a Sudanese native who fled for Kenya in 1993, and was resettled in Boston in 2015; he has since made Lowell his home. Biar has been involved with the International Institute as a program participant, intern, staff interpreter, and ambassador. He has told his story as part of IINE's "Suitcase Stories" series many times throughout New England, raising critical awareness of refugees and immeasurable support for the organization. Biar recently graduated from Middlesex Community College and is now a student at the University of Massachusetts - Lowell.

Jit Magar arrived in the U.S. as a refugee from Bhutan on May 28, 2009. He serves as the President of the Bhutanese Community of Lowell, an active cultural and mutual assistance association. Mr. Magar is a Manager at the Cintas Corporation, a company he first joined with support from the International Institute.

Richard Makokha is a social entrepreneur who emigrated from Kenya to the U.S. 20 years ago. In 2015, he founded the New America Center - Lowell, a community-based organization providing case management and economic empowerment services for newly arrived refugees and immigrants. Mr. Makokha works primarily with African communities, particularly refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo; he also works for the Congolese Community Development Center of Lynn. He has performed hundreds of hours of community service throughout Canada, Europe, and Asia for which he earned an Unsung Hero Award from the Rotary Club of Keene, NH. He has a Master's Degree in International Community and Economic Development from the University of Southern New Hampshire, and lives with his family in Lowell.



Lydia Mattei, daughter of Polish immigrants, became Executive Director of the International Institute of Lowell in 1981, following 15 years of volunteering for the organization and serving on the Board of Directors; she led the organization for 17 years. During the 1980s, Ms. Mattei played an invaluable role in resettling and welcoming Cambodian and Vietnamese refugees to Lowell.

Nadode “Alphonsine” Mukanyarwaya came to Lowell as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2011. Alphonsine has become a respected leader in her community, supporting others along their integration journeys. She works as an interpreter for the International Institute, providing linguistic support for Swahili, Kinyarwanda, and Kinyabwisha. She is also a healthcare provider who earned a nursing degree and worked as a nurse in her home country, and today works as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Safeena Niazi emigrated from Afghanistan to the U.S. in 2017, with the support of the International Institute, at the beginning of a major increase of Afghan arrivals to the City of Lowell. Ms. Niazi left a successful career in Human Resources in Afghanistan, having served as the Senior Human Resources Advisor for Chemonics International, and joined IINE as a staff Interpreter in 2018. Over the last year, she has played a critical role in supporting Lowell’s newest refugee community to resettle and integrate.

Benjamin T. Opara serves as Vice President of the Lowell Pan African Association and is a key organizer of the African Cultural Festival, which has been thriving for 18 years. Upon immigrating to the U.S. from Nigeria in 1990, Mr. Opara studied Engineering at the University of Massachusetts - Lowell. He later ran for School Committee on a platform of representing minority communities in the city, and today owns and operates local business, Princeton Ritz Industries.

Gladys Picanso was born into a Portuguese family in Lowell and became a prominent member of Lowell’s Portuguese community by supporting many families to transition to the U.S. Ms. Picanso served as President of the Holy Ghost Society, which has a mission to provide educational, recreational, social, religious and civic activities for its members, as well as to preserve the culture and heritage of the Greater Lowell Portuguese community.

Lucy Rivera was among the first Puerto Ricans to come to Lowell, and was the first Hispanic female to graduate from Lowell High School. She was involved with Hispanic community organizations and began her tenure at International Institute in the 1970s to help serve the incoming Latino community. Mrs. Rivera conducted her work passionately, providing critical support to Spanish-speaking clients including legal services, acquiring citizenship, housing and employment. Mrs. Rivera was crowned “Queen” of the first Puerto Rican festival in Massachusetts in 1968 and is featured in the immigrant exhibit at the Boott Cotton Mills Museum.

REVITALIZATION LEADERS

Charles Antonopoulos founded a cleaning business in Lowell in 1913, which later became Anton’s Cleaners. Today, the company has 42 locations and has received awards for business and community excellence. Through Coats for Kids and Belle of the Ball, Anton’s Cleaners provides warmth and joy to young people in New England.

Celeste Bernardo is the Superintendent of the Lowell National Historical Park, which plays a critical role in Lowell’s preservation and revitalization. Over her 33-year long career with the National Park Service, Ms. Bernardo has held positions at eight sites including the Boston National Historical Site Park, Boston African American National Historic Site, and the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

Szifra (Shifra) Birke, an executive leadership coach and financial behavior specialist, was born and raised in Lowell. Ms. Birke shared the story of her family and her name through IINE’s “Suitcase Stories” series, now airing on WGBH, and the documentary, Browsing Through Birke’s, featuring many Lowellians. Both can be viewed online. Her parents, Jewish Polish Holocaust survivors, fled to Siberia in 1939 before eventually moving to New York and then to Lowell where they owned Birke’s Department Store in downtown Lowell from 1950 to 2004. Today, Szifra serves on the Advisory Council for the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC).

Homer Bourgeois was a Lowellian philanthropist of French Canadian descent. Born in 1903, Mr. Bourgeois graduated from Lowell High School and attended North Eastern University, and supported many civic and charitable organizations from an early age. Mr. Bourgeois played a key role at Jeanne D’Arc Credit Union, guiding it through the Depression and into expansion. He used his influence to raise funds for Franco-American institutions and to support the community at large, and served as the first Chairman of the Lowell Housing Authority in 1937, working to create housing for low-income residents. Mr. Bourgeois also supported the founding of D’Youville Life and Wellness Community, an active partner of the International Institute today.



REVITALIZATION LEADERS

Frank Carvalho immigrated to the U.S. from Brazil in 1969. He has since held various positions at local banks, served as the Executive Director of the Coalition for a Better Acre, and is presently the Chief Executive Officer of Mill Cities Community Investments, a regional Community Development Financial Corporation. Mr. Carvalho serves on multiple Boards of Directors of local non-profits, and is the current Co-Chair of the Lowell Foreclosure Prevention Task Force.

John Chemaly is the co-founder and President of Trinity EMS, a major regional emergency medical services provider. Mr. Chemaly sits on numerous Boards of Directors and has provided vital support for local organizations, including the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lowell, the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Middlesex Community College, Lowell Catholic High School, and the YMCA of Greater Lowell. In 2019, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Association for Community College Entrepreneurship.

Arthur Demoulas opened Demoulas Market in 1917 after Arthur Demoulas emigrated from Greece in 1906 and settled in Lowell. Originally located in the Acre neighborhood, Demoulas' Market Basket has remained true to its original mission of being an affordable community grocery store. During the Great Depression, the Demoulas family supported Lowell families by helping to feed those who were struggling. Over the decades, Market Basket has employed many of IINE's refugee clients.

Clementina Derocco served as Director of the International Institute of Lowell from 1947 - 1959. She guided the organization through the post-World War II period, including the establishment of the Displaced Person's Act, the first U.S. legislation to address refugees. According to Ms. Derocco, "The 'one-world' idea is nothing new to International Institute policy, for we've always felt that the more understanding we have of people, the better for all of us."

Nancy Donahue and the late Richard K. Donahue have devoted extraordinary philanthropic and creative energy to support the revitalization of Lowell. The Donahue family name extends to every corner of the city and supports academic, cultural, service, and civic initiatives that reach hundreds of thousands of people each year. As a testament to their deep roots in Lowell and their faith that Lowell will continue to thrive as a hub of multiculturalism, education, and welcome, the Richard K. and Nancy L. Donahue Charitable Foundation supports Middlesex Community College, the University of Massachusetts - Lowell, UTEC, and IINE, as well as Merrimack Repertory Theatre and the New England Quilt Museum.

George Duncan founded Enterprise Bank and Trust Company in Lowell in 1989 and serves as Chairman of the Board. Mr. Duncan has had a profound impact on the City of Lowell and its revitalization. Through philanthropy, civic engagement, healthcare, housing initiatives, and support for a wide range of non-profit organizations, he has been a key advocate for immigrants and refugees. George grew up in a diverse neighborhood in Lowell. He continues, through his affiliation with Enterprise Bank, to actively promote diversity in hiring and demonstrates a lasting commitment to serving the community.

Newell Flather was raised in Lowell in a family with a tradition of valuing immigrants. This is evidenced in his role as President of the Theodore Edson Parker Foundation whose mission is to make effective grants that broadly benefit the City of Lowell and the diversity of its residents. Mr. Flather has worked extensively with foundations in developing innovative and effective ways to engage with grantees and provide assistance beyond grant making. He is recognized for his early initiative in creating new community foundations throughout New England, including the Greater Lowell Community Foundation. His lifelong service as volunteer began in 1961 when he was in the first group of individuals to join the Peace Corps, where he taught high school in Ghana.

Charles Gargiulo, life-long Lowellian, founded the Coalition for a Better Acre in 1982, a membership-based community development corporation dedicated to resident empowerment and the sustainable revitalization of Lowell. Motivated to action through witnessing the destruction of Little Canada, Charlie strongly advocated and challenged Lowell officials to ensure that the city's revitalization work benefitted all people, and was instrumental in saving large parts of the Acre from being demolished. He is the author of a memoir, Farewell Little Canada.

Pauline Golec is a retired Arlington teacher and long-time activist in Lowell's Polish community who spreads the legacy, history, and tradition of her community through education. Ms. Golec played a vital role in bringing Polish culture to the Lowell Folk Festival as one of the Officers of the Lowell Polish Cultural Committee, for which she serves as President today. For many years, she served as the Ethnic Chair of the Lowell Folk Festival, and worked with diverse ethnic communities. Today, she works at the Tsongas Industrial History Center, home of the interdisciplinary program, "Yankees and Immigrants," which teaches visitors about the experiences of America's immigrants.

The McDonough Family came to Lowell from Ireland during the 1850s, searching for a better life following the great potato famine. The first family member to emigrate from Ireland was Thomas McDonough. Since the late 1800s, several generations of the McDonough family have operated the McDonough Funeral Home and opened their arms to grieving families in their time of sadness. Today, Mr. John McDonough hosts the City Life television program, to which he invites local leaders to discuss current events and community issues.



Deolinda (Machado) Mello served as Executive Director of International Institute of Lowell from 1958 to 1980, during large waves of Portuguese, Cuban, and Puerto Ricans arrivals. She believed that a successful transition to American life began with learning English, as she had witnessed in her own family, and therefore also taught English classes at the International Institute. Mrs. Mello spoke four languages fluently, and took it upon herself to interpret and advocate for clients. She was the first woman to receive the “Citizen of the Year” award from the Greater Lowell Kiwanis Club, and worked with Senator Edward Kennedy to pass legislation to increase access to U.S. citizenship for immigrants. Above all, her greatest satisfaction was in reuniting immigrant families.

Dr. Patrick Mogan was a World War II veteran and former Superintendent of Lowell Public Schools. An educator and public visionary, he believed that the city of Lowell could help people connect to their cultural traditions and serve as a model for communities around the nation. The Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center has been named for him to honor his dedication to revitalizing the Lowell community.

Luis Pedrosa, an immigrant from the island of Sao Jorge, Azores, arrived in the U.S. in 1969 and graduated from Lowell High School. Four years later, he founded his first business, Qualitronics, which was sold in 2000. He returned to the electronics contract manufacturing industry in 2004 as cofounder and president of Accutronics, Inc. in Chelmsford, MA. As a respected business owner, philanthropist and caring and committed member of the Portuguese community in Lowell, he is the founder of the Portuguese American Scholarship Fund, an endowed fund at the Greater Lowell Community Foundation, and the Helio and Amelia Pedrosa Endowed Chair in Portuguese Studies at UMass Dartmouth. Mr. Pedrosa has received numerous awards for his philanthropic contributions and is a trustee of both Circle Health and The Theodore Edson Parker Foundation, and a board member of Enterprise Bank.

Mark & Elisia Saab are philanthropists and enthusiastic investors in the future of Lowell. Mark began his career as an innovator in the field of plastics. Together with his entrepreneur wife, they launched Advanced Polymers, which is today part of MedTech Group. Elisia, who is from Portugal, has adopted Lowell and the Merrimack Valley as her own. In addition to operating a salon in the city, she serves as Executive Director of the Saab Family Foundation, which supports programs devoted to education, youth, elderly & disabled, low income, housing & homelessness, and social responsibility.

Theodore and Anna Szczechura have worked tirelessly to serve both the Polish community of Lowell and the community at large. Ted was the first President of the Lowell Polish Cultural Committee, founded in 1974, and served on the Board of Directors of the International Institute when it was located on High Street. Anna organized a Polish Dance Troupe, taught English as a Second Language to immigrant parents of children in the Lowell Public School system, and volunteered at the International Institute. Together, the couple dedicated many years to the Polish booth at the Lowell Folk Festival. Fluent in both English and Polish, they have provided much-needed translation support for the community.

Former U.S. Representative Niki Tsongas and the late former U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas served in the public sector on behalf of Lowell and the region. Born in Lowell to Greek immigrant parents, Paul Tsongas had an immeasurable impact on the Lowell community as a U.S. Congressman from 1975 - 1985, including the development of Lowell’s National Historical Park and the successful advocacy for federal funds for the revitalization of downtown Lowell. Niki Tsongas served as a U.S. Representative from 2007 to 2019, and in 2011, co-sponsored the Attracting the Best and Brightest Act, in support of bringing more immigrants into the U.S. The Tsongases’ commitment to the people of Lowell and to the city’s immigrant roots has helped to shape it for future generations.

Ani Vong is a refugee of the Cambodian Genocide, who came to the United States when she was two months old. Owner of women’s boutique Humanity in downtown Lowell, she supports revitalization through her entrepreneurship, her work on the Lowell Plan Board, and through the empowerment of women from all walks of life.

Dr. An Wang emigrated from China to the U.S. where he founded Wang Laboratories in 1951. His decision to relocate the company to Lowell in the 1970s contributed significantly to the city’s economy and impacted thousands of immigrants’ lives. Wang Middle School of Lowell is named in his honor.

Jim Wilde has served as the Executive Director of the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership for 27 years. The MVHP prepares, educates and counsels low and moderate income earners to become responsible home owners. The MVHP has worked with many of the International Institute’s refugee clients. Mr. Wilde serves of several boards including the Pollard Memorial Library Foundation, The Lowell Development & Financial Corporation, and the Common Ground Development Corporation. He also is a member of the Lowell Historic Board. When not busy with home buyer training, he loves to travel the world.



SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERS

James Aung emigrated from Myanmar to the U.S. where he co-founded SayDaNar Community Development Center to support Lowell's diverse Burmese community, and served as the organization's beloved Executive Director. Through his role at the Department of Public Health, he helped refugees and other immigrants navigate the American healthcare system. James has since returned to Myanmar in order to use the education, skills, and knowledge that he learned as a U.S. citizen to tackle the deep-rooted challenges that most impact vulnerable populations.

Judge Jay Blitzman is the First Justice of the Middlesex County Juvenile Court and presides at the Lowell Juvenile Court. Prior to his judicial appointment he was a founder and the first director of the Roxbury Youth Advocacy Project, which formed the basis for a state-wide public defender juvenile department. Judge Blitzman is also a co-founder of Our RJ, a diversionary restorative justice program designed to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, and co-founder of Massachusetts Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CfJJ). Judge Blitzman serves on advisory boards of Our RJ, CfJJ, and UTEC. He also teaches juvenile law at Northeastern School of Law and trial advocacy at Harvard Law School.

Amrith Fernandes Prabhu emigrated to the U.S. from the United Arab Emirates. She is of Indian descent from the Mangalorean Catholic Community and has lived and worked in Lowell for over a decade. She currently serves as the Data and Capacity Manager at The Center for Hope and Healing and co-leads The Greater Lowell Taskforce to End Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Ms. Fernandes Prabhu is an activist in the anti-violence movement and has worked extensively with immigrants and refugees, women and children, and victims of sexual violence.

John Levy was born in the West Indies in 1797. After many years of seafaring adventure, he settled in Lowell in the 1830s and established a barber's shop. As an advocate for the abolition of slavery, he used his position as a connector in the city to bring well-known abolitionist literature and speakers to Lowell. This included a 1841 visit from the abducted men who had survived the Amistad revolt, after their successful acquittal in the U.S. Supreme Court, and before they were repatriated to Sierra Leone. Levy's legacy as a powerful advocate in Lowell was highlighted when his daughter, Rachel, published his memoirs in 1871 just before his death in 1879. Today, his descendants live all across North America.

Edith Nourse Rogers was the first woman to represent Massachusetts in Congress, serving for 35 years. Congresswoman Rogers was a great friend of the Veteran and sponsor of both the G.I. Bill and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (the WAACs). She spoke out early against Hitler's policy on Jewish people and, with the Wagner/Rogers Act, led a major effort to resettle 20,000 Jewish German youth in 1938; sadly, this was blocked in committee and did not come to fruition. She was educated in Lowell and remained actively involved in the community throughout her life.

Dr. Hai Ba Pho and Dr. Lan Tuyet Pho came to the U.S. in the 1950s as foreign students with a commitment to gain an advanced education and return home to Vietnam to contribute to the development of their country. Subsequent to the Vietnam War, they became immigrants and, together with a handful of friends, in 1977 they founded the Indochinese Refugees Foundation (IRF) with a mission to aid refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The IRF played a critical role in advocating for refugee admission, cultural orientation, and resettlement services including ESOL, job placement and training. Until their retirement, both worked full time as a faculty member and administrator at the University of Massachusetts Lowell and have published widely on refugee policy and resettlement.

Sovanna Pouy is the Executive Director of the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association (CMAA). Born in a refugee camp in Thailand, Sovanna resettled to the U.S. in 1981 and eventually moved to Lowell to reunite with family. With the support of a CMAA community service employment program, Sovanna began his career in non-profit at the United Teen Equality Center (UTEC), where he served with dedication and passion for 12 years. Today, Sovanna sits on multiple Boards of Directors, including both Community Teamwork, Inc. and the Greater Lowell Health Alliance, and lives in the Highlands with his wife, Lianna Kushi, and two daughters.

Maria L. Santos is an attorney with over 25 years of experience, and a partner at the Law Offices of Alphen and Santos, P.C. Her practice is focused on immigration and nationality law, including employment and family-based immigration. Throughout her career, Ms. Santos has supported many young people with their DACA applications, often not charging legal fees to those most in need. She does the same for victims of abuse, often women and their children who needs assistance with Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) processes. Maria has been a member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) since 1996 and remains active in the efforts for national immigration reform. She speaks fluent Portuguese.

Beatriz Sierra immigrated to Lowell from Colombia in 1979. She is active both in the local Colombian community and in supporting disadvantaged children in Colombia to receive an education rather than leaving school to work in mines. Today, Ms. Sierra works for Mass Hire Greater Lowell Workforce Board where she supports youth to secure employment.



LOWELL “FIRSTS” TRAILBLAZERS IN ELECTED POLITICS

John J. Donovan

First Irish-American Mayor of Lowell, serving from 1883-1884.

Edith Nourse Rogers

Lowell resident and first Massachusetts woman elected to the U.S. Congress, serving from 1925-1960.

Dewey G. Archambault

First Franco-American Mayor of Lowell, serving from 1936-1939.

George C. Eliades

First Greek-American Mayor of Lowell, serving from 1951-1952.

John J. Janas

First Polish-American Mayor of the City of Lowell, serving from 1954-1955.

Ellen A. Sampson

First woman elected Mayor of Lowell, serving from 1964-1965.

Laurie Machado

First Portuguese American woman elected to City Council in Lowell, serving from 1993-1995.

Rithy Uong

First Cambodian American City Councilor in Lowell, serving from 1999-2001.

George Ramirez

First Colombian elected to Lowell City Council, serving from 2005-2007.

Joseph Mendonca

First Portuguese American man elected to Lowell City Council, serving from 2009-2013.

Rady Mom

First Cambodian-American to be elected to Massachusetts State House of Representatives, elected in 2016.

Dominik Hok Lay

First Cambodian American member of the Lowell Public Schools Committee, elected in 2017.

Eileen Donoghue

First woman to serve as City Manager of Lowell, selected by the City Council in 2018.

Lori Loureiro Trahan

First Portuguese-American, Lowellian member of U.S. Congress, elected in 2018.

Lowell Sunday Sun

GOD BLESS AMERICA—The students of the International Institute School started singing their classes in learning the song. The school at the International Institute School started last October and will end this week prior to the celebration of "I Am An American Day" next week. The students, who are of various nationalities, are: Mrs. Andrew